

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

FILE ONLY

2 June 1986

7:00 P.M.

Ronald Pelton Spy Trial

GARRICK UTLEY: First, the trial of Ronald Pelton. He is accused of selling secrets to the Soviets, big secrets on how the United States eavesdrops on their high-level communications.

Here is James Polk.

JAMES POLK: Ronald Pelton took the witness stand today to admit he was paid \$35,000 by the Russian KGB for what he knew about the National Security Agency. Pelton recounted what he had confessed to the FBI: that he had meetings in Vienna, staying in the Russian Ambassador's private apartment, where, Pelton said, "The questions were given to me in writing. I answered in writing." The sessions lasted about three or four days, eight hours a day.

Pelton's testimony was a final attempt to convince the jury the FBI tricked him into confessing. He said he was not warned for hours of his right to silence, that the FBI talked him out of calling a lawyer. Pelton testified, "I would never have sat down and talked to them at all if I'd understood their intent was to take what I said and turn around and use it against me for prosecution."

He refused to admit the told the FBI anything about any secrets he is accused of selling. "I was doing my best to stay on the edges," Pelton said to the prosecutor. "If I went into any classified information at all, that was something that could never be pulled back."

The prosecutor, in cross-

examination got Pelton to concede he had been trying to hold back details as a bargaining chip.

The jury looked skeptical, even hostile, during Pelton's full day of testimony. In the end, Pelton conceded he had answered FBI questions even after signing a waiver of his rights.

The judge did order Pelton acquitted on one count, the espionage charge involving Pelton's first visit to the Soviet Embassy after this phone call.

RONALD PELTON: I have something I would like to discuss with you, I think that would be very interesting to you.

MAN: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

POLK: The judge said Pelton could not legally be prosecuted in Baltimore for something that took place in Washington. But the phone calls to the embassy can be used as evidence in the main conspiracy charge.

Pelton is the only defense witness. Cross-examination continues in the morning. The case could go to the jury by nightfall tomorrow.

UTLEY: Concern about leaks of classified information has long worried the Reagan Administration. White House correspondent Chris Wallace reports that President Reagan, at a meeting with advisers today, agreed that there will be no blanket use of lie detectors. Each government agency will decide for itself. All departments have been asked to reduce the number of people with access to classified material, and the FBI may be asked to set up a special unit to deal with leaks.